CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1.   A nodal calling system used to place phone calls to callees, the nodal calling system

comprising:

a.   a database comprising a plurality of phone numbers and at least one data field

associated with each of the plurality of phone numbers, the at least one data field

containing information representing a geographic location;

b.   a memory for storing a message to be transmitted over at least one phone line;

c.   a mapping device for defining a calling area, the calling area used to select a

subset of phone numbers from the database, each of the subset of phone numbers

having information representing a geographic location within the calling area in

the at least one data field associated with the phone number;

d.   a temporary file for storing call requests, each of the call requests containing one

of the phone numbers from the subset of phone numbers selected from the

database;

e.   at least one telecommunications interface connected to the at least one phone line,

the telecommunications interface providing the ability to initiate phone calls to

the callees using the call requests stored in the temporary file; and

f.   a network interface connected to a network, the network interface operable to

send call requests stored in the temporary file to a remote node, the remote node

operable to initiate phone calls to the callees using the call requests.

2.   The nodal calling system of claim 1 wherein the network interface further provides the

ability to receive additional call requests from the remote node, the remote node

containing a second database comprising a plurality of phone numbers and each additional call request received from the remote node containing a phone number selected from the second database.

3. The nodal calling system of claim 2 wherein the temporary file is further operable to store the additional call requests from the remote node, and the at least one telecommunications interface is further operable to initiate phone calls to callees using the additional call requests from the remote node.

4. The nodal calling system of claim 1 wherein the temporary file is a queue.

5. The nodal calling system of claim 1 wherein the calling area is an emergency area and the mapping device is operable to automatically update the emergency area to a new emergency area.

6. The nodal calling system of claim 5 wherein the mapping device is operable to automatically update the emergency area based upon the path of a weather event.

7. The nodal calling system of claim 5 wherein, the new emergency area is used to select a new subset of phone numbers from the database, each of the new subset of phone numbers having information representing a geographic location within the new emergency area in the at least one data field associated with the phone number.

8. The nodal calling system of claim 7 wherein new call requests are stored in the temporary file with each of the new call requests containing one of the phone numbers from the new subset of phone numbers selected from the database.

9. The nodal calling system of claim 1 wherein the message to be transmitted over the at least one phone line is an audio message.

10. The nodal calling system of claim 1 wherein the message to be transmitted over the at least one phone line is a fax message.

11. A method of automatically placing phone calls to callees in a calling area, the method comprising the steps of:

    a. providing a database comprising a plurality of phone numbers and at least one data field associated with each of the plurality of phone numbers, the at least one data field containing information representing a geographic location;

    b. recording a message to be transmitted to the callees;

    c. defining a calling area to receive the recorded message, the calling area used to select a subset of phone numbers from the database, each of the subset of phone numbers having information representing a geographic location within the calling area in the at least one data field associated with the phone number;

    d. generating call requests and storing the call requests in a queue, each of the call requests containing one of the phone numbers from the subset of phone numbers selected from the database;

    e. initiating calls to callees based on a first group of the generated call requests; and

    f. sending a second group of the generated call requests to a remote node, the remote node operable to initiate phone calls to callees based on the second group of call requests.

12. The method of claim 11 further comprising the step of receiving call requests from the remote node and each call request received from the remote node containing a phone number not contained in the database.

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13. The method of claim 12 further comprising the step of storing the call requests from the remote node in the queue and initiating phone calls to callees using the call requests from the remote node.

14. The method of claim 11 the calling area is an emergency area, and the emergency area is automatically updated periodically to a new emergency area.

15. The method of claim 14 wherein the emergency area is automatically updated based upon the path of a weather event.

16. The method of claim 15 wherein, the new emergency area is used to select a new subset of phone numbers from the database, each of the new subset of phone numbers having information representing a geographic location within the new emergency area in the at least one data field associated with the phone number.

17. The method of claim 11 wherein the message to be transmitted to the callees is an audio message.

18. The method of claim 11 wherein the message to be transmitted to the callees is a fax message.

19. A method of using a local node and a remote node to place telephone calls to a group of callees, the method comprising:

    a.   defining a calling area;

    b.   selecting a plurality of phone numbers from a database based on the calling area;

    c.   storing a plurality of call requests in a local temporary file, each call request containing one of the plurality of phone numbers and at least one data field containing information about processing the call to be made to the one of the plurality of phone numbers;

d.   sending a first call request of the plurality of call requests to a local serving

program for determining whether to process the first call request from the local

node or the remote node;

e.   sending the first call request to a local template program for processing the first

call request if the local serving program determines to process the first call

request from the local node, the local template program operable to

(i)   place a call to the telephone number contained in the first call request and

generate a first call response, and

(ii)   send the first call response to a local gate program which generates a

statement to update the first call request in the local temporary file or

remove the first call request from the local temporary file;

f.   sending the first call request to a remote gate program for entering the call request

in a remote temporary file if the local serving program determines to process the

first call request from the remote node.

20.   The method of claim 19 wherein the local gate program sends the statement to remove

the first call request from the local temporary file to a second temporary file, and the

local server program removes the statement from the second temporary file and executes

the statement against the local temporary file.

21.   The method of claim 19 wherein the local gate program executes the statement to update

the first call request against the local temporary file.

22.   The method of claim 19 wherein the first call request sent to the remote gate program is

received at the remote node and entered into a remote temporary file.

23. The method of claim 22 wherein the first call request entered into the remote temporary file is sent to a remote serving program which delivers the first call request to a remote template program which places a call to the telephone number contained in the first call request and generates a first call response, and sends the first call response to a remote gate program which generates a statement to remove the first call response from the remote temporary file.

24. The method of claim 23 wherein the remote gate program also generates a statement for delivery to the local node to update the first call request in the first temporary file or remove the first call request in the first temporary file.

25. The method of claim 19 wherein the at least one datafield includes a priority datafield containing information about the order in which the first call request should be processed in relation to a plurality of other call requests.

26. The method of claim 25 wherein the information in the priority datafield for the first call request is changed after it is sent to the remote node to reflect the priority of the first call request in the remote node.

27. A method of operating an automated nodal calling system comprising the steps of:

a. providing a local node comprising a database having a plurality of phone numbers;

b. generating a call request at the local node, the call request including one of the plurality of phone numbers from the database;

c. providing a plurality of remote nodes operable to process the call request and generate a call response for the call request, the call response indicating the result of the call request;

d.   providing a network connecting the local node to each of the plurality of remote nodes, the network allowing the local node to send data to each of the plurality of remote nodes and receive data from each of the plurality of remote nodes;

e.   sending the call request to a first of the plurality of remote nodes for processing the call request; and

f.   sending the call request to a second of the plurality of remote nodes if the call response has not been received from the first of the plurality of remote nodes following a predetermined period of time after sending the call request.

28.   The method of claim 27 further comprising the step of preventing the first of the plurality of remote nodes from processing the call request if the call request has not been processed following the pre-determined period of time.

29.   An automated nodal calling system comprising:

a.   a local node comprising a database having a plurality of phone numbers, the local node operable to generate a call request, the call request including one of the plurality of phone numbers from the database;

b.   a plurality of remote nodes, each of the remote nodes operable to process the call request from the local node and generate a call response for the call request, the call response indicating the result of the call request;

c.   a network connecting the local node to each of the plurality of remote nodes, the network allowing the local node to send data to each of the plurality of remote nodes and receive data from each of the plurality of remote nodes;

wherein the local node is further operable to send the call request to a first of the plurality of remote nodes for processing the call request and send the call request to a second of

the plurality of remote nodes if the call response has not been received from the first of the plurality of remote nodes following a predetermined period after sending the call request.

30. The automated nodal calling system of claim 29 wherein the first of the plurality of remote nodes is prevented from processing the call request if the call request has not been processed following the predetermined period of time.